

the great unknown swami

Part 2 – from Mussoorie to Gangotri

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The great unknown swami. He will continue to stay unknown, I hope. He is from somewhere, you know. And, he keeps traveling, all the time. I get to know from others that he had just passed by a certain place, and I hope to meet up with him ahead, along the road, somewhere, but he has moved on to some other place. But, at each place, with someone, he leaves behind his memories, and a story. I have been collecting these stories wherever I hear about him, and I hope you will love them, as much as I do.

From Mussoorie to Gangotri

Rakesh got back to the road, climbing steadily towards Mussoorie. It was nearly noon by now, and the unknown swami kept eating the morning *pakor*s he had bought at the Dehradun railway station. There were many sights to see along the road but the unknown swami had no intention of stopping anywhere. He seemed to know the road well, and must have come by on the route on a number of earlier occasions. Rakesh knew the road thoroughly, with all its good and bad patches and he knew that he could drive through even at night without any trouble. As they neared the Mall road, the unknown swami informed Rakesh that he would like to have some lunch first, at any easy-to-park roadside small-time dhaba-like eating place before he could be dropped at the government institute. He wanted to eat local cuisine only and nothing else.

He did not seem to need any discussion. Each point of instruction was conveyed to Rakesh in a very soft spoken voice, gently, with deliberation, and with emphasis on the full-stop, as though conveying that there was to be no other option. They drove above the mall road area and beyond the administration academy towards Kempty road. Within the city roads on the valley facing outwards to Kempty, Rakesh stopped at a small roadside eating house. There were quite a number of patrons, mostly rickshaw drivers, local vendors and villagers from

nearby valleys. There seemed to be only one standard menu, *lauki-chana* (= bottle-gourd and lentil-grams), vegetable curry, *dal* (= lentil soup), *parathas* or *aloo-parathas* and rice. There was a distinct absence of any menu card, and the wash basin was remarkably dirty and filled with soap scum and used cut-lemon slices littered within. For Rakesh, who was a true native from Badrinath, and closely associated with the temple, being a Dingri, it was almost taboo to be dirty or to eat at a place that was not cleaned efficiently.

The unknown swami did not seem to notice anything wrong with anything at the eating place. He went inside, in his clean white qurta and walking stick and picked up a dirty large plastic water-jar from one of the tables. He came out of the hotel on to the road with the plastic water-jar and washed his hands on the roadside, and returned to the tables inside. He did not ask anyone, and nobody seemed to mind. There was a pile of old newspapers near some snacks-shelves and from among that, he pulled out a couple of sheets and used them to wipe the dirty benches and table. Having done so, he sat calmly and allowed for Rakesh to join him at the same table by an inviting gesture. He had chosen a spot nearer to the cooking area, and instructed the cook directly to serve vegetables, *parathas* and rice with *dal*. The lunch was completed in dignified silence, and yet Rakesh felt extremely at unease, as he could feel the eyes and curious glances of everyone at the eating place. The impeccable demeanour of the unknown swami was entirely out of sync and the curiosity levels were high. But, this was a town that was used to the movement of all sorts of persons, tourists, visitors, officers, businessmen, godmen and sadhus, one and all, and they were only intent on placing this stranger within a label of sorts.

Again, it happened all so suddenly. Rakesh was quite startled to watch it unravel in that nondescript eating place, along the roadside in Mussoorie. It seemed so strange at the beginning, and then, as it happened, Rakesh was drawn into it, and did not seem to be away from the incident, and thus, remembered it word by word, enough to tell the

story to me, fifteen years later. A man on the neighbouring table engrossed in his eating, quite loudly it seems, was blissfully carrying on by himself. The unknown swami was happy watching him, enjoying his peace and content manner of eating and was smiling in the happiness that the sight had invoked. At one moment, the man looked up and saw this gentleman smiling at him, a very gentle but happy smile, and was startled. He continued with his eating, but kept looking up at the unknown swami who had looked away by then, because he realised that he had disturbed the happy man from his pleasure. After a while, the happy man was distinctly unhappy or morose, and disturbed, and kept watching the stranger-gentleman intently. Finally, the unknown swami looked back at him, with affection and a human bonding spirit, and smiled at the happy man. That smile seemed to break everything loose at that instant.

The happy man had finished eating by then. He walked up to the dirty wash basin, washed his hands and mouth, and wiped them off on his shirt and trousers, and came back to the unknown swami's bench. He sat across at the same table alongside Rakesh, whom he had not seen at all, it seemed. The unknown swami smiled again at the happy man, who seemed gently perturbed. The happy man spoke, "*Janaab* (= Sir), can I ask you something? I feel I know you from somewhere. I think I know you from a long long time ago, but I am not able to remember. I feel that you are part of something that happened in my life, many years ago. But, seeing you today, here, and seeing you in Mussoorie, is a surprise for me. I can feel my heart racing and my eyes are blurring with tears. My throat is very heavy and I am not able to speak, for my mind tells me that I am supposed to be extremely happy that I see you now. Do you remember me?"

The unknown swami had begun eating by then, and did not answer immediately. He smiled again at the happy man and patted the man's hands that were on the table. He did it so gently, with his left hand, in a very affectionate gesture, slowly and softly, and yet, even Rakesh could

feel a pleasant vibration. A bond, a message that seemed to flow from the unknown swami to the happy man. He asked, "My friend, I do not remember rightaway, but yes, I do feel that we know each other. You seem troubled, my brother. You look happy, and yet you seem troubled. What is it? Even if we do not know each other, can I help you? Do let me know." At the touch, with the feel of affection, and from what the unknown swami spoke, the happy man became all that more agitated. He grabbed the unknown swami's left hand with both his palms and sat there, silently, not saying anything. His mind seemed to agitate terribly, and his emotions had made him speechless. He kept looking at the unknown swami's eyes and sat there silently. The unknown swami did not seem to mind, and continued to eat slowly. Rakesh could feel the eyes of everyone in the eating place on them, and wondered as to what was to happen next.

Others who had eaten, and had washed their hands, had come to sit around them, not wanting to go out of the eating place. The owner had come out from behind the counter, and sat on the table where the happy man had sat down to eat. He looked at the unknown swami with growing awe. Two groups of tourists were blissfully going at their lunch in a farther corner. They had not noticed anything developing. They would soon, Rakesh thought, when they would find the cook being busy with not cooking anything at the moment. For he was also watching this situation with the unknown swami. The happy man managed to control himself after a while, and poured himself a glass of water and had it, gulping it down rapidly. He spoke, "*Janaab*, I know you from some years ago. You had come to our town. I am from Karnaprayag, and I used to run a chemist shop at the chowk. I remember now. You were in search of some ancient temple and were passing through. My parents were also in the shop on that rainy night. I remember you now."

The unknown swami showed visible pleasure, and replied, "Oh yes. I remember you too. You have changed a lot. You were a young

schoolboy then, helping your parents at the chemist shop at night. You look like your father a lot. I remember your father well. We stayed in touch for 2-3 years later, and I met him twice again. We spoke a lot, your parents and me. You sat quietly in that first visit, but I remember you. How did you recognise me? Must be my dress. I have not changed at all for many years, I think. Isn't that correct? But, you look so sad, my young friend. What is wrong? What is troubling you, so much? Is everything all-ok with you at Karnaprayag? Are your parents well? What are you doing here, in Mussoorie?"

The happy man replied, "No, not at all, *Babuji*, nothing is ok with me. My parents are dead, having been swept off in a crowded taxi-jeep, in a landslide in heavy rain, south of Karnaprayag, on the road where you used to travel. Nobody found their bodies. Twelve people died in that landslide, but they could find only two bodies and parts of the jeep. Everything had been smashed in that thunderous river and the landslide. People stopped looking, and I keep going there, again and again, each year, for the past four years. I have been hunting and meeting government officers without end. I am not alone, *Babuji*, there are many people like me, every year, in these mountains. You, and others, come to these mountains for the gods and for the temples and for finding peace and magic. For us, these mountains are the burial valleys for our fathers and mothers, for our families, for many hundreds who die in each monsoon."

The other people in the eating place nodded in agreement. The tourists were eating unmindfully, talking in loud tones. The shopkeeper looked back at them in irritation, and turned to the unknown swami and the happy man, and said, "He is correct, *Babuji*, everyone comes here, expecting the Himalayas to be like a beautiful photograph all the time. There are people who curse everyone, including the local people, if there is a landslide, or if there is a delay, or even if there is heavy rain. Once, I heard a family that came to eat here, they had just returned from the Kempti waterfalls, and they were complaining about it all the time

that they were eating. Their problem was that they could not take proper photographs because the waterfall was too tall for their cameras. So, they blamed Kempty and Mussoorie. We lose so many people from the mountains each year. I know this boy, he looks so old now. He is not an old man. He is a very young boy. He looks too old mainly because of his problems."

A possible *tonga* (= horse-cart) driver, obvious by his dress, or possibly someone who had been managing *kachchars* (= mules that were employed for carrying stuff), came to sit alongside the shopkeeper. He had purposefully - he made quite a show of it - shut off his *chillum* (= smoking pipe) outside the eating place, and packed the entire thing into a cloth bag, and had come to stand inside while listening to the happy man talk about his situation. The *tonga* driver, sitting alongside the shopkeeper now, spoke, "No, Pandey Master, not everyone complain when they come here. There are those who come regularly, even if there were problems in their previous trips. O *Babuji*, I knew this young boy's parents. They would come regularly from Karnaprayag to pick up medicines, and I would load them on to the buses. I knew them from many years. His mother did not know English, and she did not know anything about the medicines, but she learnt everything only after her marriage. She could talk for 2-3 minutes in English, and read and write postcards. Their death made us all feel very sad."

The unknown swami had completed eating his lunch. He did not seem to eat visibly, except that Rakesh noticed suddenly that his plate was empty, and he had just washed his hands by standing up from the table, and leaning out of the eating place, across a counter, and had used the dirty big plastic water jar again. Everyone had gone to the washing basin, and here he was, this decent gentleman, who did not mind doing stuff that others did not do at that place. He had sat back at his bench, smoothly, within a few seconds, and nobody seemed to notice, and nobody objected to him washing his hands off and across the counter, and on to the road. Everyone seemed to accept it as THE behaviour of

the place. Amazing, thought Rakesh, who had also completed his lunch, but went up to the wash basin to wash his hands and rinse his mouth. He came back to the table and sat down, wondering what was going to happen next.

The unknown swami took the happy man's palms in his own, and spoke pleasantly, in a soft voice, but one that could be heard by everyone nearby, "I am very very sad, my young friend, extremely sad. I knew your parents, and I have their postcards, written by them, asking me for introductions and contacts to marketing people and other things. I have also written to them on many occasions. I did wonder about the silence for the past 3-4 years, but I have not come up to Karnaprayag recently. I was traveling elsewhere. They were absolute diamonds, your parents, absolute diamonds. I know your shop from even before you met me on that rainy night. I would not be alive, if it were not for your father, nearly fifteen years ago. I had a very bad stomach upset, eating at the Karnaprayag chowk, and drinking the water from a *serai* there. In those days, there used to be a *serai*, if you would go past the chowk, southwards. This was for the caravans coming up to Kedarnathji and Badrinathji. Your father saved me that day when I could not even talk or describe or explain it to him."

That sort of news sharing brought everyone closer to the unknown swami and the happy man. They came to sit around the table, and the cook and his helper stopped their work and also sat down. The group of pilgrims at the corner had just stopped waiting for their *rotis* and *dal* and had decided to stop their lunch. They had been given a bunch of cola drinks and they were sitting it out. It had started drizzling outside the eating place and this brought in more people inside. They saw this group of people sitting around the unknown swami and they realised that something was happening. And, they decided to sit and listen. The happy man was crying, happily it seemed, and he was holding on to the unknown swami's hands, and was listening carefully. A grown up man

crying did not seem to be a strange sight to these people, thought Rakesh. Maybe they were all just too emotional.

The unknown swami continued, "I had had a very bad stomach upset and the medicines that I had with me were not helpful. I had gone to your father's shop and it was late at night. They were about to close the shop, and it was raining. Not drizzling like it is now, but it was raining heavily on that night. The pilgrim traffic had stopped because of land slides on many locations. There were no dumpers or bull dozers in Karnaprayag. The vehicles were being used in other places. The pilgrims had come to stay overnight and it had continued for more than 2-3 nights. I had been staying at a local lodge for two nights and did not know how many more days I would be staying there. Your father had one look at me, and realised my problem. There must have been many patients from the eating places in Karnaprayag, I think. He gave me a tablet without asking me anything, and a glass of water from a special bottle he kept with me, boiled and filtered I think, and asked me to sit in the shop to wait out the rain."

"During the time that I sat with him, at the shop, your mother kept taking care of the accounts and talking to the local villagers who kept coming for medicines." he continued, "They were also stuck at Karnaprayag like I was, and were not able to return to the villages. They knew your mother, and called to her by name, and each one called by a relation, like, aunty, sister, mother, daughter or cousin, and some called her by respect, and some even called her as 'doctor'... for them, she indeed was, a doctor. She would give them medicines and would also discuss their problems with them. For some, it was medicines that they had to carry back with them to the villages, and they did not know the names of the medicines that they had purchased during their previous visits. She had a notebook for everyone, and she kept them in an open cardboard box, and would pull them out and refer to the pages, and would ask about the patient. For them, she was a god, really."

The happy man seemed content, finally. He replied, "*Babuji*, I remember the way she was able to be in touch with everyone. I find it so difficult to be as good as my parents. They were two people in a tiny small medicine shop in a small small town, if you compare it with Mussoorie, Dehradun or Delhi. There were about five more medicine shops in those years, and they were all good at their work. Now, there are more than twenty medicine shops in Karnaprayag alone, and more in Rudraprayag. I keep trying but I am not good enough. There are people who are good and there are people who are very bad. Today's world is about family, and you should never give up on family. What if I am not ready? I keep going back to the landslide location to search for my parents. I hope that someday, magically, they will come back, and tell me that they had just gone on a pilgrimage. That moment never comes. I see the same sadness in many people who come to our shop and I can see that they are all hoping that my mother would be sitting there, to welcome them, and my father would be there, with his ability to choose the correct medicine."

Rakesh kept hearing the conversation and also kept looking at the people who had gathered. They were listening quietly to this seemingly normal discussion between any two persons. But, they were all silent, and wonderous, attentive and keen. The unknown swami was the same person who had entered the eating place for lunch, and he seemed to have changed as the discussion had continued. It was like a moment that would not have taken place earlier, or if it would happen again. But, they had all been part of it. The discussion seemed to have been out of control, but it had been like an incantation. They did not want to disturb it, and they did not want to rob it off the essence. Nobody wanted to go back to an earlier point in time, and they all wanted to continue within the conversation. They wanted to go with the discussion and wanted to be part of it all. Nobody wanted to be left behind. They did not want to stop this lovely feeling of watching something happen. Of course, we would not know if Rakesh was correct in his thoughts or was just

jumbled up like everyone else at that moment, or if he was adding flavour to the situation after fifteen years, but, we will go along with him, for now.

The unknown swami spoke to the happy man again, "I have seen people go mad with their situations. You may go crazy thinking about all that could have happened. Or, you could just have fun with your life. Your parents would have wanted you to be happy. Those villagers out there, around Karnaprayag, they depend on you for their medicines. You are not young and you will not get those days again. You were a different person in those years, and you were a different person when your parents went missing. You are a different person now. You should know that your medicine shop truly works, when it works for the people who come there. They do not come for the trust they have in the medicines, but they come in the trust they had for your mother and father, and they look for you to demand their love and respect. You have to lead with example and with affection. You will be like a colour TV that has taken over a black and white TV. They programmes change every day. You are like that only. Nobody is interested in whether the actors and movie stars are inside the TV box. The people who come to you are only interested in getting their problems solved. Think of the power that god and your parents have given you to help them out. Go and do it, my boy. I will come and meet you when I come to Karnaprayag. God bless you."

They stood up, and Rakesh asked the shopkeeper for allowing them to pay their bill. Again, like at *Har-ki-pauri*, Rakesh saw that everyone were keen to shake hands with the unknown swami. Again, there were one or two who tried to touch the unknown swami's feet, but were disallowed gently. The happy man seemed very content and hugged the unknown swami. That set off others who also wanted to hug him, and they did so. The unknown swami did not seem to mind any of that affection. He looked at everyone like true friends that he had met and would meet with again. They would come up again, and it would be like

a group of friends who would grow up in different places and keep meeting again. Suddenly, it seemed like what do these people understand? Rakesh wondered. Did it matter if they understood anything? They were all just like people he met every day, in all these places, and today, they were different. He would have to save these memories and he would have to watch these images again and again, to know that people can be friends, only if someone listened to them.

They got out of the eating place and got back to the vehicle. The happy man was waving at them, and the unknown swami waved back at him. They drove back to the government institute. The unknown swami had to attend a conference or something that Rakesh did not know anything about. He found a comfortable corner in the parking area for the vehicle and got himself busy making friends with the security guards and the reception desk persons and the housekeeping and cleaning boys. They knew one another, having met sometime, or seen one or the other somewhere. They knew their category or slot at Mussoorie, and recognised Rakesh for being a regular visitor with guests and VIPs coming for various meetings and seminars. The happy swami had given him some money to use for dinner and other expenses. With some negotiation, Rakesh soon found a table at the mess kitchen and got some dinner to eat with the security guards and later sat up late with the kitchen staff watching TV. Everyone went off to sleep on the sofas in the TV lounge and got up early, around five am or thereabouts.

Rakesh saw the unknown swami go about before breakfast and later moving into the seminar halls and going around at lunch and talking to other delegates. After lunch, he came up to Rakesh and told him to be ready to go off towards Dharasu to be on their way to Gangotri. The unknown swami came back at 3 pm and was just about ready to get away from the seminar. They got back on the road, driving out of Mussoorie towards Kempty and onwards. The silence was back, and they had stopped at Kempty for the unknown swami to purchase lots of eatables, cold drinks, fruits and biscuits. He had also purchased a couple

of canvas water bags and had them filled up at *adhaba* nearby. These canvas water bags were now tied to the radiator in front of the jeep and would get to be chilled and cold when they would want them. After a while, the unknown swami slept off, and Rakesh drove slowly, around Dharasu. It was about past nine pm and they checked in to a lodge at the edge of the town.

The unknown swami asked Rakesh to park the vehicle and come in to sleep in the same room whenever he would be ready. It was indeed quite cold and chilly and Rakesh was quite happy to be able to sleep in a warm room. It was a small lodge, with only about ten rooms but they had a good hot cup of tea and a decent kitchen and a dining room. They served dinner with *parathas* and a nice hot bowl of mixed vegetables followed by rice with *aloo-curry* (= potato curry). Dinner was partaken in silence, with two boys serving them silently, almost sullenly. The unknown swami went up to the reception desk and picked up a bunch of newspapers and magazines and went back to the room. He kept reading for beyond midnight while Rakesh slept off immediately. In the morning, by six am, when Rakesh woke up, he saw the unknown swami sitting silently on the open balcony, soaking up the early morning sights, with a cup of hot tea. He must have got up early and got ready without making any sound to disturb Rakesh from his sleep.

Rakesh went up to the unknown swami and greeted him and stood at the balcony, watching the Bhagirathi river flow by, quietly and peacefully. The entire image looked so very innocent and entirely pleasant. They had not crossed the river from the Highway 94 to Dharasu town, but had taken a room in a lodge that was totally unlike a lodge. Most pilgrim facilities on the *char dham yatra* (= four great pilgrim places route) were similar, if one looked for the nearest place at night. Moderate prices, good decent rooms, nice food and strong cups of tea and undisturbed view of the rivers. The costlier and better lodges came with all their situations, including crowded parking, large pilgrim groups, sullen room boys who knew that these pilgrims would not give

generous tips, and worst of all, insufficient hot water for bathing. The smaller lodges had enough of hot water and one could get better facilities if one would tip the boys properly.

The unknown swami remarked, "Rakeshji, do you see the Bhagirathi? How pleasant it is? Only last month, it was at its most terrifying worst, with floods affecting more than 200,000 people. A friend of mine, an engineer in the roads department, lost his life while trying to erect an emergency bridge. This was the river that even Lord Shiva warned about to Bhagirath. He warned him that we will not be able to control the spate of the river if it decided that it be so. And watch how it goes by innocently today? Who will believe that this was the same river that took nearly fifty lives in the previous month, and all of them near Dharasu? Get ready soon. I will ask for breakfast. We will eat and be on our way to Uttarkashi. I cannot wait to be away from this place though this is so pleasant and the lodge is very good. But we must be on our way again."

They were back on the road, driving up from Dharasu towards Uttarkashi. It could have been a quick ride through, but the Himalayas are always daunting in their challenges. There had been about three landslides in the previous week, and narrow pathways had been gouged out through the sillage. Traffic on either way was stopped and vehicles were being allowed in turns. The almost thirty kilometre route took about three hours, almost like driving in downtown Mumbai, as the unknown swami remarked. Rakesh was used to these delays on the *char dham yatra* routes and he was realising that the unknown swami was also quite used to the aspect of a slow journey. He did not remark on the delay, and waved pleasantly at the very large and fat policeman who was organising the traffic at one of the landslide points. The policeman also waved back with a pleasant smile. It must have been a terrible day for him, but the contact with the unknown swami always resulted in a smile with most people, as Rakesh saw.

They drove past the Tiloth power plant project. It had just started construction then. The roads were crowded with vehicles moving about for the power plant and there were many tea stalls during those years. The project has been completed only recently and the roads are easier to drive through nowadays. Rakesh wondered if the unknown swami knew about the Bhali underground tunnel that took water from the Bhagirathi River to generate power. The work was almost complete, but the headworks had not been commissioned during those years. The unknown swami seemed to know Rakesh's thoughts and nodded, and pointed vaguely, "Yes. That is a great tunnel. It takes the waters from the Bhagirathi to the Bhali dam out there. I have been there. The Chief Engineer used to be my friend. I have also stayed at the project site." Rakesh was amazed. Those were out-of-bounds areas for even the local taxi drivers. They reached Uttarkashi by noon and had lunch at a rapid drive-by *dhaba* just after the town. The unknown swami did not seem to be keen on eating at any place within the town.

After lunch, Rakesh decided to stop at the *char dham* camp site at Maneri, to take a quick siesta. He was tired and exhausted, driving bumper to bumper through the Dharasu to Uttarkashi road, through the land slide points. It had been raining and the road was slushy. The jeep could not be recognised from the outside. At Maneri, Rakesh asked two boys from a local tyre-repair shop to clean and wash the jeep while he took some rest.

The unknown swami agreed with him and talked his way into getting a room at the camp site at Maneri. The camp site overlooked a beautiful lake created by damming the Bhagirathi. It seemed like bliss. Rakesh hoped that they could stay for a longer time, but they would have to leave the place to be enroute to Gangotri. He wanted to be at the town by nightfall. It was dangerous driving past Purga and between Harsil and Lanka along the Bhagirathi. Even veteran tourist bus drivers avoided driving that stretch.

The Maneri camp site was not much of a camp site in those years. Nowadays there are well designed and nicely constructed huts that double up as so-called tents. Fifteen years ago, the Maneri camp site was just that. Tin sheds and some tents, and a small cottage for the office. There were private sheds and some tyre repair shops and places for vehicles to be brought in out of the road during heavy rains. Rakesh and the unknown swami found a wierd shed, allotted to them by the office because they wanted to stay for only two hours. The shed had three walls and two cots. The open side had chicken wire mesh nailed to a wooden frame, and it had been tied to the walls of the shed. A old fungoid tarpaulin was hanging over it to prevent the chilly wind from making it uncomfortable. Rakesh slept off peacefully, while the unknown swami had opened out his diary to write some notes. He had promised Rakesh that he would wake him in a couple of hours.

The nap completed, they were back again on the road, with a much cleaner jeep now. The road seemed more open, and it was easy driving through the mofussil towns of Malla, Bhatwari, Raithal and Salang. The unknown swami seemed to know all these places, and he pointed out an eating place somewhere, a temple someplace, a viewing point that could get one a good photograph, if the light was right, and bailey bridges across rivers that were dangerous and also pointed out old bailey bridges that had crashed. Rakesh picked up speed through Sunagar, Gangnani and Rishikund, and finally, around five pm, the road was empty, without oncoming traffic, and they drove fast through Dabram, Sukhi and Jhala, and as he wanted it, he was going through Purga at around six pm. This was good, he thought, and drove cautiously between Harsil and Lanka. This was the dangerous bit, and the unknown swami kept talking about each place, and mentioning some anecdote of a previous journey. These were recounting of small happenings and not enough to make an interesting tale. Perhaps someday, I would be able to travel with the unknown swami in these

regions and be able to understand the remarkable aspects of the stories he had told during that drive with Rakesh.

The final drive came through, from Lanka to Bhairavghati and at last, the run to Gaurikund. They seemed to be in time for the night prayers at Gangotri and the unknown swami could perhaps make his way through the smallish looking crowd of devotees and get a good place for himself inside the temple. Rakesh drove into a good spot at the parking lot nearby, and ensured that it would not be an inconvenience to other vehicles. There was no reason to get into an argument or a fight with other drivers at Gangotri. After all, they were brothers in the trade, and would need each other's help, whenever. The unknown swami alighted from the jeep and walked about in the parking lot, and strangely, went up to the traffic policeman on duty nearby. They chatted together for some time, and suddenly, the policeman and the unknown swami turned about and went to the temple. The policeman passed him on to a local policeman on duty, and he in turn escorted the unknown swami with great respect and awe, to within the temple. Wow, thought Rakesh, that was something done very easily. How did he manage that? They must have known him. They seemed to be expecting him here. They had recognised him.

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